

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel claims 42 and 44, and amend the claims as follows:

1-14. (Cancelled)

15. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for connecting tubulars using a top drive, comprising:

a body connectable to the top drive;

a plurality of rigid gripping ~~elements~~pistons radially displaceable by hydraulic or pneumatic fluid directly applied to an inner surface of each gripping ~~element~~piston to drivingly engage a tubular to permit a screw connection between the tubular and a further tubular to be tightened to a required torque, the plurality of gripping ~~elements~~pistons disposed within the body in substantially the same axial plane with one another; and

a sealing packer to inhibit, in use, fluid in the tubular from escaping therefrom.

16. (Previously Presented) The apparatus as claimed in claim 15, wherein said sealing packer is actuated by hydraulic or pneumatic fluid.

17-25. (Cancelled)

26. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for connecting tubulars, comprising:

a top drive;

a body connectable to the top drive; and

~~a plurality of recesses~~at least one recess disposed within an outer surface of the body, wherein ~~each~~the at least one recess houses ~~at least one~~ rigid gripping element,

wherein ~~each~~the at least one gripping element is ~~at least one~~ piston radially displaceable outward from ~~each~~the at least one recess by ~~hydraulic or pneumatic~~ fluid directly applied to an inner surface thereof to engage a first tubular.

27. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the at least one gripping element transfers rotational torque from the top drive to permit a screw connection between the first tubular and a second tubular.

28 (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 27, wherein the screw connection is tightened to a prescribed moment.

29. (Cancelled)

30. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 31, wherein the first section comprises a splined recess into which a splined connecting member may be located.

31. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for connecting tubulars, comprising;
a top drive;
a body having a first and second section;
a plurality of recesses disposed within an outer diameter of the second section and disposed in substantially the same axial plane with one another; and
a rigid gripping element disposed within each recess, wherein each gripping element is a piston radially extendable from its respective recess with pressurized hydraulic or pneumatic fluid directly applied to its inner surface.

32. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 31, wherein the gripping elements are radially extendable to engage an inner surface of a tubular.

33. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 32, further comprising one or more compensating pistons, wherein the compensating pistons are pneumatically operable and adjustable to compensate for different weights of the tubular.

34. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 32, wherein the body is connected to the top drive.

35. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 34, wherein the top drive provides rotational torque to permit a screw connection between one or more tubulars.

36. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for connecting tubulars using a top drive, comprising:

 a body connectable to the top drive;

 a plurality of rigid ~~gripping elements~~pistons disposed in substantially the same axial plane and radially displaceable from a plurality of recesses within the body by pressurized fluid directly applied to an inner surface thereof, the plurality of ~~gripping elements~~pistons gripping a tubular torsionally to tighten a screw thread on the tubular and gripping the tubular axially to carry the weight of the tubular; and

 a sealing packer to prohibit pressurized fluid in the tubular from escaping therefrom.

37. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 36, further comprising one or more compensating pistons, wherein the compensating pistons are pneumatically operable and adjustable to compensate for different weights of the tubular.

38. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for connecting tubulars using a top drive, comprising:

 a body connectable to said top drive;

 a plurality of rigid ~~gripping elements~~, fluid-actuated pistons disposed within a plurality of recesses within an outer surface of the body in substantially the same axial plane with one another;

 a fluid communication path for delivering fluid pressure directly to the inner surfaces of the plurality of ~~gripping elements~~fluid-actuated pistons, the fluid pressure radially displacing the plurality of ~~gripping elements~~fluid-actuated pistons to grip an inner surface of a tubular; and

 a sealing packer to prohibit pressurized fluid in the tubular from escaping therefrom.

39. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 38, further comprising one or more compensating pistons, wherein the compensating pistons are pneumatically operable and adjustable to compensate for different weights of the tubular.

40. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the plurality of gripping elements pistons are circumferentially spaced from one another in substantially the same axial plane.

41. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 26, further comprising a sealing packer disposed within the outer surface of the body to inhibit fluid in the first tubular from escaping therefrom.

42. (Cancelled).

43. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 38, wherein the sealing packer is disposed within a second recess within the outer surface of the body and radially extendable from the second recess to contact the inner surface of the tubular.

44. (Cancelled).

45. (Currently Amended) A method for manipulating tubulars, comprising:
providing a gripping apparatus comprising:

~~a body having a plurality of recesses circumferentially spaced therein, the recesses in substantially the same axial plane~~ at least one recess therein, and

~~a plurality of rigid~~ at least one gripping elements piston disposed within the ~~plurality of~~ at least one recesses;

~~radially extending~~ displacing the ~~plurality of~~ at least one gripping elements piston to grippingly engage an inner surface of a tubular by introducing pressurized fluid ~~directly~~ behind the ~~plurality of~~ at least one gripping elements piston; and

rotating the tubular with a top drive connected to the body; and
~~lowering the tubular into a wellbore.~~

46. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 45, further comprising introducing fluid through the tubular while lowering the tubular.

47. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, wherein the tubular is sealingly engaged by a sealing packer disposed on the body.

48. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 47, wherein the sealing packer provides a sealed fluid path through the apparatus and the tubular.

Please add the following new claims:

49. (New) An apparatus for connecting tubulars using a top drive, comprising:
a body connectable to the top drive;
a plurality of rigid gripping elements disposed within a plurality of recesses within an outer surface of the body in substantially the same axial plane with one another;
a sealing packer to prohibit pressurized fluid in the tubular from escaping therefrom; and
a fluid communication path for delivering fluid pressure directly to the inner surfaces of the plurality of gripping elements, the fluid pressure radially displacing the plurality of gripping elements to grip an inner surface of a tubular, wherein the fluid communication path is further capable of delivering fluid pressure directly to the sealing packer to radially displace the sealing packer into contact with the inner surface of the tubular.

50. (New) An apparatus for connecting tubulars using a top drive, comprising:
a body connectable to the top drive;
a plurality of rigid gripping elements disposed within a plurality of recesses within an outer surface of the body in substantially the same axial plane with one another;
a sealing packer to prohibit pressurized fluid in the tubular from escaping therefrom, the sealing packer disposed within a second recess within the outer surface of the body and radially extendable from the recess to contact the inner surface of the tubular; and

a fluid communication path for delivering fluid pressure directly to the inner surfaces of the plurality of gripping elements, the fluid pressure radially displacing the plurality of gripping elements to grip an inner surface of a tubular and the fluid pressure further deliverable directly from the fluid communication path to the sealing packer.

51. (New) The method of claim 45, wherein the at least one recess comprises a plurality of recesses circumferentially spaced within the body and the at least one gripping piston comprises a plurality of gripping pistons, each of the plurality of gripping pistons disposed within each of the plurality of recesses.

52. (New) The method of claim 51, wherein the plurality of recesses are circumferentially spaced around the body in substantially the same axial plane.

53. (New) The method of claim 51, wherein radially displacing the plurality of gripping pistons to grippingly engage the inner surface of the tubular is accomplished by introducing pressurized fluid directly behind the plurality of gripping pistons.

54. (New) The method of claim 45, wherein radially displacing the at least one gripping piston to grippingly engage the inner surface of the tubular by introducing pressurized fluid behind the at least one gripping piston comprises extending the at least one gripping piston radially outward in a line substantially perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of the body.

55. (New) The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the at least one recess comprises a plurality of recesses and the at least one gripping element comprises a plurality of gripping elements, each of the plurality of recesses housing each of the plurality of gripping elements.

56. (New) The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the fluid is directly applied to the inner surface.

57. (New) The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the at least one recess acts as a cylinder from which the at least one gripping element is displaced radially outward.

58. (New) The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the at least one gripping element is displaceable radially outward substantially perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of the body.